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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000570

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/18/2017
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SUBJECT: NINEWA: KURD-ON-YEZIDI VIOLENCE IN AYN SIFNI
(SHIKHAN DISTRICT) 15 FEBRUARY 2006

REF: BAGHDAD 00559

Classified By: Classified by Ninewa PRT Team Leader James Knight: 1.4 (B) and (D).

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

SUMMARY

1. (C) An 'honor killing' of a presumably unfaithful Kurdish wife after her travel with Yezidi companions employed as local police led to anti-Yezidi violence by Kurds in Ayn Sifni, the major town of Ninewa's Shikhan District. Damage from the violence was narrowly targeted and relatively limited. The only death reported was that of the Kurd woman at the hands of her Kurd spouse. However, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Peshmerga militia apparently intervened to prevent police or fire brigade response to the violence and have since closed the town to most non-residents. The town is now calm, although Yezidi resentment remains high. END SUMMARY.

A FAMILY FIGHT ESCALATES . . .

2. (SBU) In view of wildly conflicting accounts of both the incident and its extent, PRT representatives including IPAO Holtsnider and Ninewa PRT's Governance Team visited Ayn Sifni 17 Feb. This visit followed several earlier PRT visits to Ayn Sifni in pursuit of the PRT's provincial communications outreach program -- the PRT team is well known to local authorities and community leaders.

3. (C) Accounts of the precipitating incident for this violence generally agree that the Kurd woman involved traveled with two Yezidi police officers from Ayn Sifni to Dahuk city, but was returned to Ayn Sifni after her arrest at a checkpoint near the city. She was killed by her Kurd husband after her return to Ayn Sifni; most accounts agree that the two Yezidi policemen were arrested by KRG Assyrian intelligence officers in Dahuk. The two Yezidi policemen involved were among Shikhan District Mayor Na'mo's bodyguards, and were ordered released by the Mayor after their return to Ayn Sifni. The release of these police appears to have triggered the violence -- both have since fled Ayn Sifni.

4. (C) Two homes believed to be occupied by the Yezidi policemen involved were burned and sacked; a Yezidi store owned by relatives of one of the policemen was ransacked; and two Yezidi community centers (Lalish Education Center and Sheikh Mend convention

hall) were looted and burned. The residence of Yezidi Emir Tahsin Beg was raked by heavy machine-gun fire and three cars parked in front of his house were burned. The Lalish shrine (not the education center) -- the holiest Yezidi site -- was not/not damaged.

. . . BRINGING THE KRG DOWN IN FORCE

¶15. (C) While in Shikhan, PRT members met KDP Chair for Shikhan District Fareq Farouq; KRG President Massoud Barzani's brother Sedad Barzani (apparently in Ayn Sifni as Barzani's personal envoy); Deputy Mayor of Shikhan District Mushtiq Asmat Abed; Yezidi Emir Tahsin Beg; and Yezidi supreme spiritual leader Baba Sheikh. Several other KRG officials and a number of lay Yezidis also attended these meetings. Dahuk Assayish commander Khasro Zebari and Dahuk Provincial Director of Police MG Abdullah Mohammed Yusif met the PRT team at the edge of Ayn Sifni, but did not join the team's meetings in the town.

¶16. (C) These leaders and authorities concurred that these disturbances were led by Sunni Kurds inflamed by the Yezidi policemen's relationship with the Kurd woman who had traveled to Dahuk. Yezidi leaders insisted they counseled the community's Yezidis to remain in their homes and not resist the Kurds, but noted that some Peshmerga were among those leading Kurds in attacks on Yezidi homes and facilities. (Note: Gunfire damage to Emir Beg's house would seem to corroborate that claim. End note.)

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¶17. (C) Yezidi interlocutors also insisted that Kurdish Peshmerga prevented police or firemen from intervening to prevent or contain damage during the disturbance. They further note that about 1000 Peshmerga are securing the town (Note: Ayn Sifni has a total population of about 15,000. End note.).

¶18. (C) A number of younger Yezidis blame KDP Chair Farouq for inciting the violence against Yezidis. Emir Beg pointed out that Coalition forces must remain in the area to contain Kurd repression of Yezidis. Beg added that Yezidis across Ninewa -- notably in al-Hamdaniya, Shikhan, and Sinjar Districts -- and in Dahuk Province of the KRG are increasingly unwilling to tolerate ongoing Kurd repression.

COMMENT

¶19. (C) The extraordinarily dense presence of senior KRG officials and security forces in Ayn Sifni after the 15 February violence suggests these disturbances are a significant threat to the KRG's expansion agenda -- particularly since it occurred in a District of Ninewa generally believed to be predisposed toward expeditious incorporation into the KRG (reftel). Shikhan has been at least partially administered by the KRG since 1991, but KRG territoriality towards this part of Ninewa province presents its own issues. Alienation of Yezidis by Kurds will cause the KRG great problems across Ninewa -- especially in Sinjar District, which also has a significant Yezidi population. KRG damage control in Ayn Sifni has been clumsy and apparently ineffective in this regard, but the urgency with which it has been pursued is remarkable.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: Sadly, the least contentious

aspect of this episode was the death of
the Kurdish woman whose relationship with the Yezidi police
sparked these disturbances -- no objection
was offered by any of the parties to her killing. END COMMENT.
KHALILZAD